

A LOST GOD.

*Only Five Hundred copies of this Edition printed
on Small Paper.*

A LOST GOD

BY

FRANCIS W. BOURDILLON

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS

BY

H. J. FORD



LONDON

ELKIN MATHEWS

AT THE SIGN OF THE BODLEY HEAD

IN VIGO STREET

1891

CHISWICK PRESS :—C. WHITTINGHAM AND CO., TOOKS COURT,
CHANCERY LANE.

ἐμοῖν ἀδελφοῖν· θατέρῳ δ' οὐδὲν μέλει.

IN the reign of Tiberius, an extraordinary thing happened to some mariners in the Ionian Sea. They were cruising at daybreak among the islands of the Echinades, at the mouth of the river Achelous, which falls into the Corinthian gulf. As the sun rose and touched with his first light the waves of the Archipelago, and the myrtle hillocks of the little islands, they heard a marvellous voice, like softened thunder, pass over them, and die away to the mainland among the Aetolian mountains. "Pan is dead," it said; and then a sighing wind followed the voice, and the frightened sailors hastened ashore to narrate what they had heard. Tradition, which has given us the strange tale, explains it by averring that on that morning Christ began His teaching.

I.
THE VISION.



Dawson's Lith. Co.

I.

THE VISION.

THERE lies an island in the Ionian sea,
An emerald set in sapphire. But the gem
Is rimmed with iron ;—rock are cliff and scaur,
Rocky the inlets and the promontories,
And sown with sunken rocks are all the bays.

It is a sea of islands and of rocks,
The haunt of sunning seabirds, fastnesses
Impregnable to any wingless foot ;
A sea so thickly set with point and peak,
That to the eyes down-looking—could we mount
Where sails yon lonely seahawk—it might seem
A robe of rippling blue, which flying nymph,
Or Naiad spying Satyr 'neath the hedge,
Had caught and left there, pierced with all the thorns.

It is a sea of white wings and white sails,
Of soft wings swooping near, and snowy sails
That hang far off upon the hazy blue ;
For on the horizon Eastward like a cloud

The mainland lies, the purple hills of Greece.
And yonder is the entrance to the gulf
Of Corinth, whence or whither seek the sails.

See, but one sail is nearing!—Is it sail
Or sea-bird, snowy-gleaming in the sun?
Too slow for bird, yet nigh too swift for sail,
Save happy hearts are there, and such blithe winds,
As blow for youth and pleasure.—Now 'tis clear,
The huge heaven-pointing pinion like a cloud,
And the black prow beneath that dips and springs
Danced round with rainbows in the leaping spray.
Now large and larger looms the bellying sail
Close under the sheer cliff; then suddenly
Shifted to round the headland, shows the barque,
Careening as she feels the helmsman's hand,
Gay fluttering garments, faces young and fair.
Then, like a scenic curtain, right before
The flowery fringes of the cliff-top rise,
And vanishes the vision. Sea and sky
Are lonely, and the light wind in the grass
Sighs to be back in that soft-bosomed sail,
Or fanning that fair company.

But hush!

What are those footsteps? Who are that bright pair
Who mount the daisied ramparts of this dell?
Lovers they should be by the harmony
Of their lithe bodies, swaying as in time
To unseen music; lovers, by their hands
Enlacing; lovers, by their silent lips
And eyes more eloquent. And who but lovers

Had left that laughing crew, and sought alone
This solitary dimple of the down?

Leander. O dearest, I am glad to be here alone
With Nature's silence, and with your soft eyes.
I have such tidings that I could not tell
To any ears but yours, and scarce to yours
But that I know how beats your heart with mine.
My wound you will not scorch with jest, or numb
With silent incredulity, more cruel;
Nor say my dreams have followed me from sleep
Into broad daylight, as a madman's do.

Helen. Ah! heart of my own heart! Have I not borne
Already, though unknown, your grief—my tears
Scarce stayed from flowing, as I marked all day
In what unfathomable gulfs of gloom,
Below the rippling mirth that buoyed the rest,
Your spirit wandered lonely? Till at last
Their laughing lips, 'twixt jest and sympathy,
Whispered, "A wolf has seen Leander first."
What secret weight is this that bows you so?
Tell me, that I may share its burden! Would
That I could take the whole and leave you none!
Yet trouble shared, unlike the manual load
Which two that lift take half and half exact,
Oft lightens in the telling, and the two
Bear but the tithe of what the one had borne.

Leander. Listen, sweet syren! Have you ever dreamed
A dream so hideous as that God can die?

Helen. Nay, the Immortals send no dreams like that.

Leander. Yet have I dreamed it, if it were a dream

And not some dreadful drama played in heaven
To waken terrors and win tears of gods.

Helen. Nay, the Immortals act no plays like that.

Leander. Nay, neither dream nor drama do I think it,
Unless I dream now, or you act, your love.
I saw, I heard, as now I see and hear.—

Immortal Gods ! a most reposeful faith
Grown in our core from childhood ! Yet we see
Grey earth herself, called Mother of the gods,
Grow older ; and the stars grow dim and die ;
And godlike heroes, and great emperors,
Are they not mortal ?—All that lives must die.
How, if the gods live, must the gods not die ?

Helen. Nay, but what saw you, heard you ? Which is lost
Of those bright presences who fill with light
The heaven they live in, and the earth and sea
With life and love and loveliness ? Ah, nay !
It cannot be ! Earth could not spare one god,
The least of all, who only leaves the ground
Greener for his light footfall, or the wind
More music-laden for his murmuring wings,—
Earth could not spare one god, if heaven could spare.

Leander. Listen, and I will tell you !—Nay, not thus !
Lay your soft hand in mine, but gaze not so
With those love-kindling eyes, lest their soft fires
Fuse the sharp outlines of my memory.

Two nights ago I sailed at set of sun
Out to the Westward, where the glory led ;
And when it sank and darkness fell, I found
The wide blank sea, that mirrored all the stars,

Spread round me, as a blind man feels the night.
So to one star I steered, that hangs in May
At midnight o'er the heights of our dear hills,
So stedfast I have deemed it was your love,
My guiding star, that is itself the Heaven
To which it leads me. And it led me then.
But dreaming lay the winds that drowsy night,
The sails flapped idly, and the very stars
Moved overhead scarce slower than I sailed.
So half content, half vexed, to be so stayed,
I lay me down beneath the unnumbered eyes,
And gazed and dreamed.

And the gods sent me dreams,
Dreams not of sleep but waking. Temples rose
Out of the darkness, brightening as the bow
Upon the rain-cloud ; unlaborious fanes,
Unbuilt fabrics, such as architects
In vision see and imitate in vain
With earth-stuff, ponderous marble, garish paint.
Each lucent temple held a god within,
That made its light and glory, as the flame
Gleams glorious through the glasses of the lamp.
The endless genealogies of Heaven
Were there,—the eldest born of gods, whose years
Are countless and eternal as the stars.
Zeus, regent now, seemed youngest in the ranks ;
Next, grandsire Saturn ; and behind, unnamed,
Forgot of men or never known of men,
Long dynasties of hoar divinities,
Crowned and discrowned by ancient wars in Heaven,

Or ever men were made or knew the gods ;
And behind all a glory that the eyes
Could not behold, that swallowed all the rest,
The gods, the temples, the familiar stars,
Which still shone faintly through the veil of light.

But one amid the gods I found not,—one
That most I sought amid the temples missed ;
The human god who loves the world of men,
And still to human eyes reveals himself, •
Though rarely, as in happier ages past
Our poets tell us all the gods were wont,
Who now regard not men. Him as I sought
Wondering, with waxing trouble, suddenly
There was a stir as when a wind begins
In a still woodland. From the temples all
Arose a wailing, and the white-robed gods
Came forth innumerable in multitude.
Right in the midst was borne a white-dressed bier,
And all behind and all in front the gods
Moved in procession. And no music's note
Was needed, for their very moving made
And their melodious tread a funeral march
Fuller than trumpets.

To the pyre they came
Built high from heaven to heaven above the stars ;
For every god had laid a bough thereon,
Cypress, or cedar, or rich Eastern woods,
Syrian lign-aloe, santal-wood from Ind.
Deep in the dust of spices on the top
Was laid the bier ; and the flames leaped to it,

And as they licked the mantle from the dead
The face I saw, and knew the face of Pan.

Mute, motionless, I lay, in awe and love
And sorrow for the god, whom I had held
Earth's one link left with Heaven ; and in my soul
Despair rose sudden despot, to usurp
The sovereignty of reason.

When I looked,
The pyre was all consumed, and from its heart
The sacred ashes gathered ; and again
The slow procession moved. Again arose
The noise of mourning. All the vast array
Took up one dirge, as though the rolling waves
All round the world took voice articulate
And sang in softened thunder. PAN IS DEAD,
They chanted, this one burden, PAN IS DEAD.
But the miraculous virtue in the voice
Of gods made these self words so eloquent,
That like a lovely picture in the mind
Rose memories of woodland, hill, and stream,
Once brightened by his presence, now forlorn ;
Visions of ferny clefts untenanted,
And weeping water-nymphs by broken urns.

Slowly the pageant passed, like morning clouds
Moving to Eastward ; fainter grew the voice,
Like distant-murmuring thunder ; and I looked
And found the day was risen upon the sea.
The fresh breeze quickened from the South, the sail
Filled, and with all the Nereids at her prow
My vessel flew with rippling laughter home.

But not the laugh of those invisible bands,
Nor the wind's freshness, nor the dancing spray,
Nor all the brightness of the springing morn,
Could lift the cloud of sorrow from my heart.
As in a dream I landed, heard the cries
Of sailors and of fishers on the quay,
New come to haven from their nightly toil.
As in a dream I passed them, bearing still
That vision in my soul ; so that the crowds,
The busy streets, the solemn temples, seemed
No worthier notice than the nests of ants
Upon a hillside whose far height is snow.
Even to this hour I walk as in a dream ;
Earth, sea, and sky wear unfamiliar looks ;
I move like a child-actor at a Masque
He understands not ; purposeless my path
As theirs who in mid-journey meet the news
He whom ye seek is dead.

Helen. Oh, I have heard
Amazed, seeing that vision through your eyes,
And hearing through your ears the awful voice.
Yet, oh, Leander ! Think you that the gods,
Were this no acting but reality,
Would thus reveal to man that they could die ?
So dark a secret should be deeply sealed,
And all the clouds that wander through wide heaven
Close thickly round, to cloke from mortal eyes
Rites so significant to mortal kind.

Leander. Ay, were it one of the great gods who died ;
But Pan was ever human, ever dwelt

Among us, with us, of us ; god with man,
 As man with man ; to death-expectant eyes
 Revealing, in the rainbow and the flower,
 That mortal tenements might entertain
 Immortal tenants, love and loveliness.

Helen. How think you then ? Did Pan love men so well
 That he put off his immortality
 To dwell among them ? What dread Power is that,
 Inexorable, dealing thus the lots
 Of mortal and immortal ? Is there God
 Above the gods ? Could he not break his laws,
 Being his own, and spare the one kind god,
 Albeit transgressing ?

Leander. Nay, we know him not,
 If there be God above the gods we know.
 It well might be. Else wherefore was the earth
 And for whose sake created ? Not for men,
 Who vex it for its vulgar gold, and call
 Mountain and moor, where Nature shows herself
 Most lovely, waste and wilderness. And yet,
 If earth be the gods' pleasance, if for them
 Sleeps on the hills the sunlight, on the woods
 Lies like an azure veil the evening air,
 Why leave they their fair garden to be fouled
 By men whose life and death they hold as nought ?

It well might be there is some higher God
 Above the gods we know.—Have you not felt
 A Presence in the woods on April eves,
 A sudden sanctity in the earth ; and thence
 An upward panting of the soul, a gasp

Of the most inward self to some unknown
 Unutterable joy, to which the life
 Uplifts itself, searching the empty air,
 Like the lean caterpillar?—Long I thought
 Such ecstasies the effluence of Pan,
 And sought him breathless down the branching glades.
 He was not there: surely had he been there
 To eyes so faithful and so fond as mine
 Some glimpse had been vouchsafed. At last I came
 To think some higher than he must visit thus
 Invisible the earth; and in my heart
 The long-grown hunger for the sight of God
 Grew more insistent. Not indeed the thought
 To view that Blessed One, whom so to feel
 Transcended vision; but my boyhood's hope,
 Grown to a manhood's purpose, to see Pan.

Ah, happy who have seen him, whom the world
 Calls madmen! These alone are poets—not
 The apt mellifluous metrist, not the deft
 Industrious rhymers. Needs the fire of heaven,
 The earthquake, the long lonely hour with God,
 Before our flower-edged lyric rivulets
 Flood over with the impetuous dithyramb.

Ah, sorrow, sorrow! How doth harlot Fate
 Granting our prayers fulfil not our desire!
 Pan I have seen,—a darker secret learned
 Than seers who have wandered to the nether world;
 And lo, where I had looked for light, 'tis night,
 And where for hope, despair!

Helen.

What, hath not Love

Light of his own, and hath not Poesy
 Rich consolation? We're it no high aim
 To win men's sensual souls by charmed song
 To Love the empyrean, the august,
 The golden? Have you forgot your Song of Love?
 The maidens sing it, and the adulterer
 Falters in his dark purpose as he hears.
 Oh, sing such songs again!

: *Leander.* Lure me not thus,
 Thou sweeter-voiced than Syren, lest I make
 Shipwreck upon some shallow vanity!
 My song and service may no more be Love's.
 He is no poet, who in woodland paths,
 Where first he learned sweet utterance, lingers ever,
 Repeating ever his one woodland note.
 Forward the path leads, let him follow—up
 The steepest, down the deepest, till the end.

What is it makes a poet's utterance strong
 Except the striving to make wings of words,
 And mount from apprehended thought to thought
 Unapprehended? And what impulse moves
 To such ill-guerdoned labour but the sense
 Of things insensuous, the glint of rays
 Nebulous, indistinguished, which the eyes
 Must gaze and gaze at till they fix the star,—
 Visions of water in the vacant sand,—
 Elysian islands in the waste of sea?
 Such have I seen, such phantasms all my life
 Have followed, knowing somewhere they must lie
 Discoverable,—in our eyes unreal,

Yet real somewhere. Such high thoughts have been
Bound ever with the holy name of Pan,
And how if he be dead shall they not die,
Or prove as baseless as the world believes?

Yet have I drunk sweet comfort from your lips;
Part that the lofty name of Poet yet
Thrills me; yet rather from a lightning-flash
Of woman's insight in your words: *Did Pan*
Put off his immortality? Even so!
Surely immortals never were so kind
To mortals; never heart could sympathize
So well with human hearts that did not share
The shadow of their death on daily life.
This was his crime, that was Prometheus' once,
That he loved men; and this his punishment,
To die like men.

Helen. Then wherefore should the gods
Lament him who had fallen from god's estate?

Leander. Oh, death will reconcile the deadliest foes,
If but they once have loved; and god to god
Is haply closer tie than man to man;
And pity for a god may move the hearts
Of gods, though they be pitiless to men.

Sweet prophetess, thou hast declared my dream.
Not all the gods must die, but only he
Who chose companionship with toiling man
Rather than Heaven's serene inhuman bliss.
And here is comfort, that the god I served
Was worthiest of service. Even in death
He sent this vision, that his worshipper

Should not prolong vain service to the dead.

Alas, what other service left to seek?

Helen. Love's, for Love dies not. Is not Love enough?

Leander. For the heart enough, but not for the whole man.

Helen. Do you not love me then with all you are?

Leander. Ay, love, with heart and soul and my whole self!

But who by love lives only, starves his soul

Till the man grows unreasoning as the dog,

Who loves till death, but scarce knows what, or why.

Know you so little nature?

Helen.

Nay, I know

My nature grows complete in loving thee.

Leander. Then is your life but mistletoe upon

The boughs of love. More noble is the vine,

Ay, and clings closelier, that it has a life

Beside the tree's life.

Helen.

Yes, that is man's love.

And mistletoe is woman's.

But our love

Is deeper than all words and parables.

I do confess me wilful, woman-like,

Jealous one moment. Love is not enough,

I know it, for the needs of noble souls.

(Singing.) *Ever to some horizon he must strain
That ever vanishes, yet is not vain,
Seeking the perilous palm that none attain.*

*Love may attend him, like the gentle air
That cools the athlete's brow ; but let him care
For the end only—Love shall greet him there.*

Leander. Now are you Hope's own chorister, sweet love,
And in your voice she visits me again.
Said I what other service left to seek ?
There is no other. I will seek the old.
What if I follow to the furthest East
That wondrous funeral ? I shall find at times
Some footprint of a god, or fillet torn,
Or fallen flower ; or in some glen remote
A brighter, holier, more divine delight
On lawns and copses, where they stayed awhile
To rest, if gods need rest, or to lament.
Such traces I shall find to lead me on ;
Though, like the patient hunter, oft at fault
I roam the world, as he the woodland, through.
Till either I shall find on some far shore,
Untrodden save of gods, a mountain tomb,
Worthy a god ; or in some further clime
The lands Elysian where the dead abide,
Living in all things save the light of Heaven
And gladness of God's presence. Haply Pan
Has lightened somewhat there the sombre souls,
And cheered the thin wan shadows, as he wont
To cheer the souls that walked in shadow here.

Helen. Ah, will you leave me ?

Leander. Love, I must, I must.
Madness it may be so to trust a dream,

Yet if I trust it not I must go mad.
Fear not, sweet love ! Say I set out for gain,
Venturing a year-long voyage to win gold ;
You would not seek to stay me !—Stay me not,
Now, when I seek more precious gain than gold,
Knowledge and heart-contentment !—Fear not, love !
For if I find, I shall return to you ;
And if I find not, whither shall I turn
Save to your love for comfort ?—*Let him care*
For the end only—Love shall greet him there.

Thus as they talked, their names were called below :
And with one long embrace they turned to go.
The soft wind sighed to miss them from the grass ;
The branches stirred to stay them as they pass ;
Now they are lost ; and now once more the sail
Sweeps round the headland, leaving a long trail.
The West behind them reddens, and their wake
Is rosy in the rushing water-break.
Fainter the white sail grows ; the tall black mast
O'ertops no more the mountains ; all is past :
The wind sleeps, and the sea ; and over all
In silence deep is drawn night's gleaming pall.

II.
THE QUEST.



II.

THE QUEST.

THERE looks a lonely column o'er the sea
Close to the cliff-edge, where the Ionian land
Leans westward. Far below the hungry sea
Sucks ever at the cliff-foot ; and the temple—
Pillar and pediment and roof—is fallen,
This lonely column left. A wilding vine
Clasps it, and clings—like woman's faithful love—
Round the forsaken. At the pillar's foot
Leander lies, and watches wistfully
Each white wing that flies westward, each white sail
That dwindles to the distant verge, and dips
Below the sea-line, homeward bound for Greece.
Two years he has wandered ; for at first the heat
Of young enthusiasm had carried him
Heedless upon his visionary quest,
Counting not distance, hither thither led
By shifting rumour, like a thistle seed
Blown by each crossing current down a glade.
From hill to hill, from shore to shore, he went,
From island unto island ; till at last
Far off, 'mid alien men, Despondency
And Doubt, long kept at bay—even as a foe
That hangs on some impetuous conqueror,
Sullen, inexorable,—fell on him,

And all his fire and all his faith was lost.
And as a climber, who in heedless haste
Has clambered halfway up a precipice,
Turning at last perceives the giddy gulf :
His head swims, and his heart within him fails,
So far away lies safety : even so

Leander turning knew the unmeasured leagues
That lay between his longing eyes and home.

Ay, many were the perils ; land and sea
Alike were hostile to the wayfarer
In those wild days. Hungry and hard bested
He reached at last the sea ; and there a crew
Of pirates seized him, purposing to sell
His delicate limbs to slavery. But a storm
And shipwreck rescued him, and he was cast
Friendless but free upon the Ionian shore.

Was ever a Ulysses in sore straits
That found not a Calypso ? Gentle hands
Succoured and saved him, and a gentle heart
From pitying fell to loving, and from love
To jealousy, finding his heart was fixed
Too firm on Helen to be wooed astray.
Alas, alas, Calypso ! Can a heart
So gentle harbour such ungentle thoughts,
And kindness turn to torturing cruelty ?
For when, for all her wooing, she perceived
No step advanced, but that he ever chose,
Rather than be with her, to sit alone
By that lone pillar, watching the wide sea
And weeping : then with love and jealousy

Tormented, she contrived a dire extreme.
For feigning she had planned a glad surprise
To please him, and a secret message sent
To know how Helen fared, she brought him news,
With pitying sighs and tears and woeful words,
That Helen had been wedded and was dead;
And to confirm it shewed him letters.—Then,
So like to madness was his agony,
That she his torturer wept most tender tears,
And had almost confessed the baseless lie.
Shame held her, till occasion oft let slip
Seemed lost for ever. Calmer too he grew
As sorrow like a petrifying surge
Sank drop by drop through all the pores of being.
And all the day, yea often all the night,
He kept his lonely station on the cliff,
Soothed haply by the seawind, or the low
Long murmur of the waves upon the beach.
Till once as he sat solitary there
Some breath of Spring, some scent of flower, or song
Of far-off wood-bird, smote him like a lash
To scathing recollection. All his life
Rose up before his eyes—his boyhood's dreams,
His purpose to be poet; and the love
So lightly left, so sweet, so wonderful,
Worthy to toss aside all purposes
To win it truly:—"O fool that left it, won!"
Passionately he cried the words aloud,
"O fool!" when as an echo close at hand
His word came back to him—"Fool? wherefore fool?"

Starting he turned, and half the pillar's length
 Behind him saw an unknown wayfarer,
 Whose reverend aspect shewed him sage or seer,
 Crowned with the glory of a temperate life,
 White hair ; and long white beard upon his breast.
 Again he spoke, "Why fool?" And in his eyes
 Shone kindly light, as shine the fair twin stars
 In storm to sailors.

Rose Leander up

Crying,

O Sir, if, as I deem, you are
 Seer or philosopher or prophet sage,
 Help me ! for I lie helpless—hedged within
 The ruins of a life planned loftily,
 And scarce can breathe, or free my hands to feel
 If base beneath the ruins yet be left
 Enough to build on. Help me !

Philo.

How to help

Not knowing yet your nature or your need ?
 Nay, but I half divine it—you are one
 Sighing for Truth, as all are sighing now
 Who drown not Reason in the sloughs of lust,
 Nor poison her sweet nature with the taint
 Of cynic unbelief.

Leander.

Truth—what is Truth ?

Will some god tell us ? Nay, the gods themselves
 Are liars, since they send us lying dreams,
 And give not what they promise to our prayers.

Philo.

Hush, the gods hear ! And did the gods not hear
 The sin would be the greater, lacking even

The specious show of courage ; while each coward
Seeing thy sin unpunished should take heart
To sin more boldly. Sow not unbelief !
Doubt in thyself, if vexed by such sore plague !
But leave their faith to those who can believe ;
For all pure faith is nearer truth than doubt.

Leander. Yet purest faith may be the most deceived.

Philo. Say where your faith was fixed, wherein deceived.

Leander. In God³ my faith was, and by God deceived.

Philo. Let not the poison-flower of blasphemy
Blossom upon your lips ! Rather lay bare
Its roots to me, if haply I have skill
To purge the noxious nature. For indeed
Often are grafted on the self-same stem
The poisonous and the wholesome, being kin
As bitter and sweet apple. Tell me all
Your life—its bright hopes and its broken faiths—
As 'twere another's !

Leander. I will tell thee all.—
Mine was that happy boyhood which in fields
And woodlands knows each nesting-place of birds,
Each nook of earliest flowers. My mother seemed
Herself a very nymph of Maia's train,
More careful of the moss-built linnets' nest
Than of majestic temples ; loving more
The breath of morn or meadows after rain
Than Syrian perfumes, and the myriad eyes
Of the lawn daisies than the looks of men.
Nature was round me, as the river's breast
To little water-nestlings, and I drank,

Played, lived in her, in ever-growing trust.
Ever my mother taught me to adore
Gods in the woodland, in the mountain gods
Who made and kept the world in loveliness.
Childlike, in wonder more than awe, I asked
If I might see them ; and she smiled and said :
"Some say that they have seen them ; and even now,
"Unless our legends be but lovely lies,
"There is one lesser deity who clings
"To his old haunts in Hellas, even Pan
"The goat-foot god whom shepherd poets see."
Then eager flowed my childish questionings ;
And much she told me, winnowing fair tales
Which may be truth from foul which must be lies,
And ever afterwards I dreamed of Pan,
And thought to be a poet.

Thus the years
Passed in perpetual spring-time ; till one year
Came two most dreadful, but undreamed of yet
In all my dreams of God—came Death and Love.
Death came and smote that life so knit with mine
As birth had only severed child and mother
Body from body but not soul from soul.
And in my anguish seemed me that a soul
So wounded must full surely bleed to death.
And day by day and night by night I lay
Waiting for Death to fetch me, as a thing
Forgotten and returned for. Reason shook
Upon her throne. Until a comforter
Came—not the Death that I desired, but Love,

A kinder Death. And at Love's dawn my life—
 As Earth at morning—put away its pall,
 And took for robe the rainbow. Hopes and dreams
 Clothed as of old my soul, and hopes and dreams
 Still to one good looked only—to see God.

Then learnt I first how life's great visitings,
 Prayer's answer, hope's fulfilment, come to us
 At whiles we least expect them, and in ways
 Which least we look for. In a dreadful dream
 The revelation came for which I prayed.

He told his vision of the death of Pan,
 Fainter for two years' faded memory,
 Yet still so clear it brought the ruddy blood
 To his pale forehead, and a quicker pulse
 Into his languid veins. The sun was sunk,
 And heaven's wide arch was studded o'er with stars,
 Or e'er he ended. Silent lay the Sage,
 Smitten with his fervour, doubting not the dream,
 Yet doubting of its import ; loth to throw
 One chilling breath of doubt on the warm heart
 That glowed anew with half-forgotten fires.
 At last he spoke.

Philo. Yet was not love still left ?
 What of your love ?

Leander. Ah, therefore cried I fool,
 Fool on myself, nay madman ! for I left
 My love, my anchor of calm reason—dreamed
 That air-born pageant was a thing my feet
 Could follow, and by land and sea pursued,
 As children follow rainbows. Love is lost,

And hope ; faith only, after long eclipse,
Gleams cloudily since you have spoke with me.
Are there no gods, no goal of life, no world
Wherein our groping instincts shall find light ?
Help me, if you can help—teach me, if aught
You know, for my old teachers fail me now !

He ended earnestly as a lost child
Who asks the way of any wayfarer.
Awhile in silence his companion sat,
Fixing a far-off gaze on one lone star,
A little lamp amid large space of night.
Then suddenly,

Philo. Your teachers fail you now ?
Mine too, who long had taught me, failed me once.
I too was like a vessel that long rode
Safely at anchor, till by sudden storm
Tossed from known harbour and safe anchorage.
I too had such an anchor of the soul
As your child-faith in Nature ; nor my faith
Proved firmer fixed, though in a deeper sea.
For I am an Athenian ; I was born
Where Socrates was slain, where Plato taught ;
And I have trod the groves of Academe,
And I have worn the steps of Poecilè,
From my first years. From my first years I loved
These teachers, partly that I half believed
Their spirits haunted yet their ancient homes,
And made that sweet mysterious charm I loved
In street and temple. I too worshipped God ;
But not the gods, a little lower than man,

Whom men have made, mere images to each,
Ideal of his own yearnings, good or bad.
But the divinity that underlies
All thought, speech, action in the world ; in whom
We live and move and have our being ; of whom
Men speak, saying, If God will : or, God ordains :
Or in their prayers for friends—our highest prayers
Being unselfish—as, God go with you,
God bless you !—By no name I worshipped him :
For who can know his nature or his name,
Or anything save this, that he is good,
Since he has made the sunshine and the flowers.
Nor in much knowledge as my reason grew
I sought to find him. Man's Creator must
Transcend his Creatures, even as man transcends
The mechanism he makes. The counterpart
In God of human reason must be past
The power of human thought to reason of.

So 'mid the olives and the marbles went
My life, and still I drank new knowledge in
Of natural things and high philosophy.
Cold do you deem my life beside the fires
You told with such a fervour of your youth ?
Hard do you deem my life ? Nay, listen still !
It had its core of tenderness, its days
Of music. Have you found at times a flint,
Cold, hard, immalleable, yet perchance
Broken across ; and where you thought to see
The heart dull as the rest, bright crystals gleamed
With rainbow hues, the work of fires long dead ?

My life hides such a centre ; would you hear ?

There fell a day of Spring, when weary grown
Of a long Winter's poring over books,
And feeling, as the caged lark feels, the Spring
Calling to freedom, forth I went, and took
The road to seaward. When I reached the shore
Fresh blew the breeze, and crisping breakers curled
Into the bay. My mood was idle, dreams
Were in my head, and reason half asleep.
So finding a lone boat upon the beach,
In idleness, not asking leave, alone
I launched it, stepped therein, and hoisted the sail.
The credulous thereafter said some god
Sailed with me, held the tiller, called the wind,
That blew me softly, swiftly, till the land
Grew but a dim grey outline,—I know not ;
But on a sudden, gazing witlessly
In reverie on the waters, I beheld
Some floating wreck, a broken mast, with ropes
Trailing, like sea-snakes fastening on its life ;
And as I looked, lo, wound amid the ropes,
Lapped gently by the water, yet half dry,
An infant slept. O wonder !—Quick I seized
An oar and drew me to the spot. In haste
Unbound the knotted ropes, and tenderly
Lifted the child. Oh, was it living or dead ?
Could it be living, sleeping gently so
Amid such gaping mouths of hungry death ?
Yes, it was living. At my unused touch,
Tender, but even a tender hand unused

Is rough, it woke, and looked with large dark eyes
Up in my face, and laughed. O happy laugh !
That sweet laugh hailed me father, gave me heart
Kind as a father's, and a purpose fixed
Henceforth to be in its lost father's place.
Homeward, scarce knowing how, I sailed, and reached
The shore ; then, landed, heard the news of wreck,
A rich Phœnician merchantman, all hands,
Save one who brought the tidings, lost. My heart
Leapt as I thought, Then none can claim the babe.

'Twere wearisome to tell how day by day
Life fared, though each day in my memory
Is clear as each year's ring in trunks of pine.
But all my life was changed ; rich sunlight poured
Where had been moonlight ; nobler were the heights,
And less obscure the hollows.—Strange it is
This love that binds us to another life
So little like our own ; but such strong love,
First for the helpless thing that smiled on me :
Then for child lips that lisped me Father : last,
For a fair maiden, slim and delicate,
With wistful eyes that ever seemed aware
Of things we see not,—such life-quickenning love
Bound me to her, more dear than life itself.
She seemed the unknown hope of my young dreams,
The pure ideal of my philosophy,
The answer of full blessing to my prayers.

Must I then tell the end?—Not all the years,
Not all the dreadful years have eaten yet
Into my soul so deeply as to loose

The barbed grief that lodged there on the day
When Nerea died. "The gods had need of her,"
She murmured with a smile, and passed.

O God,
Couldst thou have need of her as I had need—
My white-winged Psyche, leading me through life
Along the paths of flowers !

Can you not guess
What shipwreck those fair vessels, hope and joy,
And reverence of God and faith in man,
Now suffered, when the convoy, love, was lost ?
What goal, what guide, what comfort, what desire,
In all the desert seas of life ?

The lapse
Of measured days restored an even pulse
To fevered reason ; the old habits came
To their old place. Philosophy was left,
Cold, clear, untroubled (bitterly I said),
As star above the storm that founders us.
I would be cold, untroubled, leaving dreams
Of God and goodness, love and loveliness.
So, locking all fair chambers I had loved,
I sought my lodging in the four bare walls
Of Stoicism ; hardening all my heart
Against soft influences, the winds of Spring,
The sight of waters, the sweet voice of girls.
Leander. Master, what gracious influence melted you
From that hard mood to what I find you now ?
Patient and gentle ear to murmurings,
Compassionate and kindly heart to grief,

Soft voice to love, fearless rebuke of wrong.

Philo. I scarce can tell you ; drops so numerous
Of blessing, unperceived as dew, came down
To soften day by day my arid will.
For first a lame child fallen in the street—
Her dark eyes were like Nerea's—strangely stirred
My Stoic humour ; and her voice in thanks
(For being so moved, I helped her to her home)
Sounded as sweet as falling waters heard
Of desert wanderers o'er the darkening sands.
And once, late passing by a lonely shrine,
I heard a mother praying for her son,
Her only son, far off, forgetful of her.
I thought I had forgotten how to weep
Till then.

Ah, once the frozen river stirs,
The break comes quickly !

Most of all I found
New founts of pity in un murmuring pain
Passing the deeds of heroes. Day by day
My heart changed in me ; and with opened eyes,
Seeing that death and grief were to the world
The law, my grief not law's unwonted breach,
I said : If man by imitating God
Can carve fair statues and ordain just laws,
Shall not God's laws exceed our righteousness
Even as His works our art, and night as light,
Sadness as gladness, death as life, be good ?
So said I, and so taught, that God is good :
All evil that we see is in our seeing,

Even as the spots that dance before our eyes
 In the full sunlight. At such simple lore
 The listeners stared, then laughed, "A Socrates !
 Athenians, hear the new philosophy !"
 But always when I heard some blatant voice
 Preaching philosophies of life, I thought :
 Who life expounds, and yet explains not death,
 He maps an island, and omits the sea.

Thus the sweet violet Faith grew from the grave
 Of Joy. Nor more I thought to understand,
 But just to take all blessing and all grief
 Blindly as good, and grope to ends unseen ;
 And haply—for who knows?—to find at last
 Some clearer region at the back of Death.
 The years went over ; gently lapsed my life,
 As meadow streams that once were waterfalls,
 With naught to mark my days save whitening locks.
 Till as a trumpet blown at dead of night
 Tidings came to me ; for whose sake I now
 Am wearying my old limbs with journey long,
 Sped onward by a freshening breeze of hope.

Leander. What tidings ?

Philo.

A new teacher in the world,
 Teaching what death is. Rumour, scant and dim,
 Still held to this that he could raise the dead.

Leander. O miracle ! What blest above all lands
 Heard first his teaching, feels his footsteps now ?

Philo. Not from our western wisdom this new light,
 From Rome or Hellas, nay nor Egypt old,
 Has risen upon the world. An ancient race,

Dark-browed, unvanquished, unvictorious,
Dwells south of Tyre. There, say they, is his home,
And there I seek him. Will you go with me?

Leander. Master, my feet are as your feet, my heart
As your heart. I will follow to the end.

III.

ACHIEVEMENT.



III.

ACHIEVEMENT.

O HILLS of Palestine ! A sadness hangs
On slope and summit, and in plains beneath
Broods as a meadow mist, the chilling ghost
Of lost occasion and long-perished hope.
O Land of Promise, how art thou become,
To hearts that love thee, land of bitterness !
Yet not the measure of thy sins was full
Then when the things I tell of chanced ; and still
Some gleams of glory visited the soil,
(Less hard than hearts that crucified the Christ).
Lilies sprang from it, gloriously arrayed,
Whose paler kindred in our bleak north clime
We name Wind-flowers.

The land was rich with them,
The unreaped harvest of the lavish spring,
When Philo and Leander, rumour-led
From place to place, passed southward. The same way
Many were journeying, and they joined the crowd,
Who questioned not, but deemed them Hellene Jews,
Haply from Alexandria or from Crete,
Who crossed the sea to keep the Passover.
At last, a hill-top gained, Jerusalem
Lay, washed with morning, at their feet ; and shouts
Rose from the multitude of joy and pride.

But little stirred their Grecian souls the sight
So unlike Greece. The white-walled city blazed
In pearl and topaz 'neath the orient blue ;
And like some gorgeous jewel's central gem,
Flashed in the midst the one vast golden shrine.
And little moved them all the spectacle,
The stirring crowds, the eager worshippers.
One man they sought, one question asked of all,
"Where is the Teacher, the new Teacher?" Much
They marvelled that so few had heard his fame,
Nor any knew if he were there or no.

But one day, wandering from the city-gate,
They met, slow-winding down the dusty hill,
A strange procession. On the gentlest beast
Rode one, the gentlest-seeming of all men.
And as he went, upon the road before
The crowd spread palms in triumph, or flung down
Their garments for the tread of those slow feet.
And with a flash of joy Leander turned
To his companion : "This is he, is he !"

Passed the procession, and with wondering joy
They followed to the city-gate, and through
The gate unto the temple precincts. There,
Forbid to enter, they were forced to turn,
And unaccomplished see their golden hopes,
That yet burned brightly ; for they said together,
Soon as the festival was passed, and stilled
The unused stir and tumult of the streets,
Then should they find him. So day followed day,
And solitary yet they dwelt, aloof

In life and feeling from the alien folk ;
And finding not amid the jealous Jews
The liberal human love of Hellenic hearts.
(For the pure souls of Hellas ever seem
Open as their own temples to the light
Of sea and land and sky ; made beautiful—
As these with sculpture—by the memories
Of noble days and deeds and heroes dead.)
Yet once again they saw the man they sought.
Three days had passed or four, and then a day
Came memorable for mysterious awe,
Oppressed with dreadful dreams, and terrible
For thick unnatural night, that at the noon
Hid earth and heaven. And when at length it passed,
And the mild evening, breathing consolation,
Brought calm and lucid the clear light again,
From the hot streets they turned, and sought a hill
Hard by the city. As they gained the brow,
A sudden horror shook again their souls ;
For gaunt against the silvery evening light,
Three crosses stretched their ghastly arms in air ;
And on them, murdered in the barbarous mode
Of the world's masters, still three corpses hung.
The public footway led beneath, and they,
Spite of repugnance, followed, murmuring low
Words of good omen to avert the ill.
And nearer drawing, round the midmost cross
They marked a little crowd, women and men
Weeping, and one who clasped and kissed the feet,
Pallid and pierced with nails. The gracious Greeks,

Reverent to human sorrow, stepped aside,
And lifted, as they passed, their eyes to see
What criminal was he whose death of shame
Was by such love attended. And the face
They saw, that none who looked on could forget,
Marred now by mortal suffering, yet supreme
Even in the pains of death o'er death and pain.
The face they saw and knew, and like a flood
Surging o'er sunny fields, o'er all their hopes
Dark disappointment swelled, and dull despair.
And like a mocking echo of their thoughts,
Fell from the scornful lips of one who passed,
"He saved others: himself he could not save."

Our years oft take their impress from one hour
Of joy or sorrow. And to these the light
Of many days was in one hour made dark.
Homeward they hasted from that alien land,
The unfamiliar speech, the cruel race,
That slew the Teacher of the blameless tongue—
Homeward across the sea all Hellenes love.
And as they drew near Hellas, their sad hearts
Warmed with the love of home; and hand in hand
They clasped, and vowed to vex their souls no more,
But live such quiet lives as all men live,
And take their daily lot of sun and rain
As others, and like others quietly
Give up the reading of the riddle, Death,

But to Leander, as they drew near home,
Rose up in starlit sky and sunlit sea
The face of Helen; and if ecstasy,

In some forgetful moment when the breeze
Came freshly and the sun danced on the sea,
Soared to its natural heaven, then swift and sure
The arrow of remembrance reached it there,
And like a wounded lark it fell to earth
In torment unremediable. At last,
On a calm eventide, when all day long
To them slow-sailing distant hills of Greece
Had lain in shadowy purple on their lee,
When Night, soft-hearted, soothing, motherly,
Had laid her loving hand upon his head,
No longer he forbore, but to his friend
Told of his life what he had left untold,
How Helen had been wedded and was dead.
But that large heart, grown wise with sympathy
More than experience of the ways of men,
Gently as he who probes a sufferer's wound
To know if he may heal it, touch by touch,
By artful questions answered artlessly,
Discerned the world-old tale of woman's guile,
Ruthless in love. And first by meaning words
Dropped lightly, then by plainer hints, and last
By open explanation, lifted high
Leander's heart to long-forgotten hope.
And now to him the wind's swift wings were slow,
And long the flying hours. But the good wind
Neither for hopes blew faster, nor for fears
Faltered, but ever bore them steadily;
Till out of a grey dawn flashed like a star
Far off a pillared temple on a height.

His eyes the earliest hailed it, and his feet
Were first upon the land. But tremblingly
He trod the well-known ways ; and sick with doubt
Came to the doorway.

Then—oh joy ! joy ! joy !
For Helen lived, and with sweet woman's faith
Had waited, and with woman's hope had watched,
And now with woman's love she welcomed him.

Nor would those long-tried comrades part again,
But in one tranquil home the three together
Lived peaceful days. Yet upon Philo's heart,
And on Leander's, still a shadow lay,
Light-brooding as the shadow of a cloud,
But unremoving and unchangeable :
The shadow of a life's high enterprise
Failed in, a great achievement unachieved.

But in the slow years' passing came a day
That brought (how little hoped for !) the fulfilment
Of their old dreams.

It fell upon a day
That Philo, moved by ancient memories,
Grew fain once more to visit his old home
In Athens ; and he left his friends awhile,
And once again with unfamiliar feet
Trod the familiar ways, streets, temples, halls,
Amid the olives and the marbles ; paced
Poecilè and the groves of Academe ;
Saw yet again the shade of Plato rise,
Lived his old life again, and found his soul
Filled with forlorn ghosts of forgotten days,

And softened with most pitying tenderness
 To the young life, that hardly seemed his own,
 Whose iridescent dreams were grown so grey.
 And the days went; and they who watched at home
 Wondered at his long tarrying. But at last
 He came, upon a golden eventide,
 That lit his face and his white locks with gold.
 And much they welcomed him, and brought him in
 Within the darkening house; and wondered then,
 Because the fire was still upon his face,
 The sunset glow, or some diviner light.

Master and friend, (Leander cried at last)
 What rapture has re-lit your eyes with flame?
 They have not burned so brightly since the hour
 When hope died in our hearts. What joy is this?
 What have you seen, what heard? May we too hear,
 And share your joy?

Philo. Ay, you and all the world.
 Well may a rapture re-illumine the eyes
 That see the dawning of an age of gold
 Fairer than fabled! Mind you him we saw
 Dead-hanging on the cross? His death that day
 Crowned hope, not crushed it as we thought. He lives
 Risen from the dead.

Leander. What, have you seen him?

Philo. Nay!

But many saw him; I have spoken with one.

Helen. O Master, tell us step by step your tale!
 We need a stairway to such heights of joy.

Philo. Climbing to Areopagus one day,

I came upon a crowd who pressed to hear
Some speaker. Drawing nearer, I beheld
One most noteworthy in the midst, of look
Most lofty, but of stature small, and raised
On steps or statue-base for all to see.
When first I caught his words articulate,
He had drawn all eyes, and stopped the smallest stir
By some arrestive power of earnestness,
Or eloquent exordium, and was saying—
“Hath raised him from the dead.” But at that word
Arose light laughter from the careless crowd
Of ritual-serving sceptics; and the most
Turned and departed scornfully. But I—
A certain wild hope springing in my heart—
Lingered, and shouldering through the ebbing throng,
Found some few others gathered round the man,
Eager to question of his wondrous news.

What shall I say? How in few words tell all?
How make you understand what power there was,
Or in the man or in his message, made
To doubt impossible, while in our ears
He told the story of the blameless life
Whose crown was crucifixion? But the sequel
Out-matched the rest in miracle;—the tomb
Found vacant in the glimmering dawn, the vision
Of angels, and the visitant who bore
In living hands and feet the scars of death,
Looked on by human eyes, by human hands
Touched for faith’s token.

Thus was taught the world

That Immortality is not the dream
 Of poets, but the real life of man.
 The light we thought a spangle proves a star ;
 The toy we lightly played with, or threw by,
 Proves treasure trusted till a reckoning-day.
 Infinity to climb—Eternity
 To spend in climbing ! See you how this world,
 Pleasure and pain, loss, gain, in such a view
 Sink into nothing ? Good and Evil mean
 To mortals little, to immortals all.

Thus that foiled painful life, looked back upon,
 Orbed into star-like glory, radiating
 A brightening revelation, as they saw—
 They His disciples who had been with Him—
 How every word and act in Him had set
 To that one central Truth, mysterious then,
 Now manifest past doubt, since He that died
 Was seen re-risen.

Leander. O Master, as the light
 Of sunset after a long day of rain
 Are your assuring words. Yet bear with me !
 Is all that I have worshipped in the world—
 Beauty, the æther of the panting soul,
 Art, that half soothes, half quickens the soul's thirst—
 Are these not worship-worthy ? And the gods,
 Whom we have revered, are they gods no more ?

Philo. Rather, I think that they were never gods,
 But lovely idols of the mind of man,
 As are their images his handiwork.
 Not the inhuman Moloch and his like :

Let them be devils as the Jews believe !
But of our Hellene gods, not all are base,
Adulterous, criminal. Consider them
Evil and good together ! Are they not
The likeness of the natural mind of man,
Each human attribute idealized ?
The best of them but earthly—and earthly things
Now dwindle in the expanse of opening Heaven.
Yet with all fair things they may take fit place ;
With stars and flowers and statues let them be,
Unmeet for worship, not unmeet for love.
But we, as men upon a mist-girt isle,
Have long enough been fooled with petty hills
And mimic rivers ; long enough have played
In earnestness with toys of flower and shell.
What, when the mist is rent, and full revealed
Lies the vast ocean, shall we turn our backs,
And shut our eyes, and make believe again ?
What madman so deluded ! When this life,—
Whose vanity our own philosophers
Have tired our ears with teaching,—this brief life
Subject to death, this body thrall to pain,
Are but for trial trusted us, to prove
If we be worthy an immortal life,
A body passionless.

Leander. But those rare moods
Of exaltation, and my dreams of Pan,
Are they illusions only ?

Philo. Nay, not so !
This Christ accomplishes your dreams of Pan

In ways beyond your dreaming ! He put off
His immortality to dwell with men ;
He laboured with the labourer ; he wept
With those that mourned. For him the wild field flower
Shone fairer than the splendours of a king.
And in all nature, earth and sky and sea,
He taught how near beneath the surface lies
The golden ore of Truth, which shining through
Awakens such wild yearnings as to me
You, Poet, have confessed.—Poet, take heart !
All that makes nature fuller-voiced to man,
Poem or picture, is of God, and lends
Its tittle of help to His untiring work
Of lifting man above the mists of self
To see the vision of the Eternal.—Christ
Has once for all done that tremendous thing
Whose awful need had pressed for ages past
On souls clear-sighted, like a cloud of doom,
And made of poets prophets menacing.
Henceforth may they look forth with lighter heart,
Fulfil their natural order, and become
Nature's interpreters in all her ways
Of herb or beast or star or human kind ;
So they give God the glory, and the first
Of aspiration, gladness, love to Him
From whom all good gifts come.

He ceased ; and now,
Scarce heeded in their converse, night had fallen.
So after some brief silence Helen rose

And filled an ancient lamp with odorous oil.
The soft light stole through all the darkened room ;
One breath of summer night just stirred the flame,
And through the window one bright star looked in.
Then looking each on other, with one thought
Moving them, on the glimmering marble floor
They knelt together, and prayed the prayer of Christ.

NOTES.

NOTE 1, p. 7.

"A Lost God."

THE short version of the well-known story of the Death of Pan, placed as an introduction to this poem, is taken from Sargent and Dallin's "Materials and Models for Latin Prose Composition," second edition, 1875, p. 257. The source of the story is Plutarch, *περί τῶν ἐκλειπούτων χρηστηρίων*.

NOTE 2, p. 12.

"Then, like a scenic curtain, right before
The flowery fringes of the cliff-top rise."

In the Greek (and Roman) theatre the curtain employed to conceal the stage was not let down from above, as in ours, but drawn up from below.

NOTE 3, pp. 11 and 29.

It hardly needs remarking that the "Ionian Sea" is at some distance from the "Ionian Land." The *Mare Ionicum* washed the western coasts of Greece. *Ionia* was part of the western seaboard of Asia Minor.



CHISWICK PRESS;—C. WHITTINGHAM AND CO., TOOKS COURT,
CHANCERY LANE.